T • W • O

# Ascending Major Powers

We live in an era of structural change. The global system leader's position has declined relative to what it once was. States that were once impoverished are climbing their way up the economic income ladder. One or two of them are large enough, it would appear, to eventually challenge the world's lead economy position. But such a challenge is not likely in the immediate future. It will require a great deal more economic development, for one thing. China and India still possess low-income economies, and they need to continue moving toward high-income economies. Not many countries have been successful in this type of transition. Stalling in the middle-income level may be just as probable as ascending ultimately to the top of the system. Along the way, however, a variety of facilitative and constraining factors will be likely to make some difference. Leading candidates for contributing to successful ascents, for instance, are political leadership and state strength.

There is also an intermediate prize for ascending states—great power status. It is not necessary to be the strongest state in the entire system to achieve most goals state decision-makers might have. The great power title recognizes elite status in a global hierarchy, which only a few states can attain. It is not so much the title that is so important but the acknowledgment that a state is near the top of the pecking order and therefore entitled to the perks that go along with the status. The most important perk may be a seat at the table at which significant decisions are made about global policies and rules. Veto power in the UN Security Council comes close to capturing this type of influence, but it is only one institutional manifestation of great power in the international system.

Great power status has a distinctive history. It is not simply an honorific title that is bandied about or asserted from time to time. Students of international relations do not agree on the prerequisites for this status, but there is some rough agreement on which states have held the rank and when. Table 2.1 outlines the codification of comings and goings in great power status as specified by Jack S. Levy. Mirroring the Eurocentric bias of international relations scholars, the great power elite circle began with five powers stretching from England in northwestern Europe to the Ottoman Empire in southeastern Europe. No states entered the elite column in the sixteenth or eighteenth centuries. Two new powers (the Netherlands and Sweden) ascended in the early seventeenth century, but both were gone a century later. In the eighteenth century,

**Table 2.1. Levy's Great Power Schedule**

| Century | Great power | Non–great power |
|---|---|---|
| Late 15th | France, England, Austria, Spain, Ottoman Empire | |
| Early 17th | Netherlands (1609), Sweden (1617) | |
| Late 17th | | Ottoman Empire (1699) |
| Early 18th | Russia (1721), Prussia (1740) | Netherlands (1713), Sweden (1721) |
| Early 19th | | Spain (1808) |
| Mid- to late 19th | Italy (1861), United States (1898) | |
| Early 20th | Japan (1905) | |
| Mid-20th | China (1949) | |

*Source: Jack S. Levy,* War in the Modern Great Power System, 1495–1975 *(Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983).*

the new recruits (Russia and Prussia) proved to have more staying power. Italy and the United States were anointed as great powers in the second half of the nineteenth century, while Japan and China achieved their ranks in the first half of the twentieth century.

Just how many of these states have survived as great powers into the twenty-first century is debatable. Levy prefers to view the European great powers as surviving into the post-1945 era, but an argument could be made just as easily that the great power status of Britain, France, Germany (as the heir to Prussia), and Italy—as well as Japan, did not survive the Second World War. Most of the other elite states lost their status in earlier wars, leaving only China, Russia, and the United States. Yet China's entry around the time of the Korean War is arguable, and Russia's continued great power status after the demise of the Soviet Union is also contestable. No one argues that these states do not have claims to elite status; it is more a matter of their claims possessing various weaknesses that render their elite status less than open-and-shut cases.

That great power status emerged in the European region is awkward in a global context. When the great powers were confined to home bases in Europe, it was easier to mix powers possessing decidedly regional capabilities (such as Austria and Sweden) with powers that had extraregional capabilities (such as the Netherlands and England/Britain). The main question was which states mattered most in Europe. Once the reference point expanded beyond Europe, it became less clear just what the criteria for club membership were.

Putting aside the equally nebulous criteria used in earlier centuries, a look at the more recent entrants (post-1850) and their capability attributes (population, military size, and energy consumption as a proxy for economic/technological wealth and development) underlines the fuzziness of the status prerequisites that might have been considered important at the time of ascension to great power status.[1] Figure 2.1 shows proportional scores for great power population size at the time of attainment of status.[2] In Figure 2.1, it is possible to say that the population size of the new great powers had been increasing prior to their elevation in rank. In two cases, Italy and Germany, the population increases reflected the integration of a number of smaller states around the Pied-

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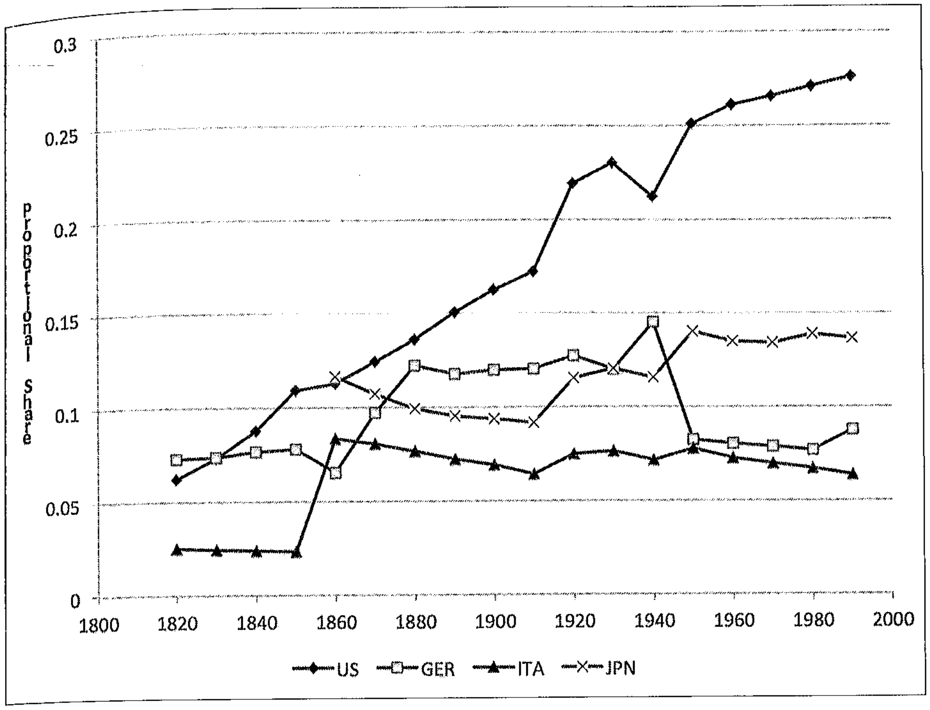



Fig. 2.1. Proportional Share of Population

mont and Prussian cores. In the U.S. case, it was more a matter of European immigration, local birth rates, and the territorial expansion of the former thirteen colonies. Nonetheless, there is no discernible threshold criterion. Italy was promoted with less than 10 percent, Germany with less than 15 percent, and the United States with less than 20 percent. The relative size of the Japanese population was actually declining prior to 1905 and only expanded afterward. China's huge population size (not shown in fig. 2.1) guaranteed it a large share of the great power pool, but that had been the case for decades, if not centuries, prior to 1949.

The story is not made any clearer by examining the number of military personnel. Italy, Germany, and the United States all demonstrate increases in military personnel as they were moving into the great power club (fig. 2.2) but, again, there is no threshold pattern. Italy, the United States, and Japan were in the vicinity of 5 percent, while Germany was

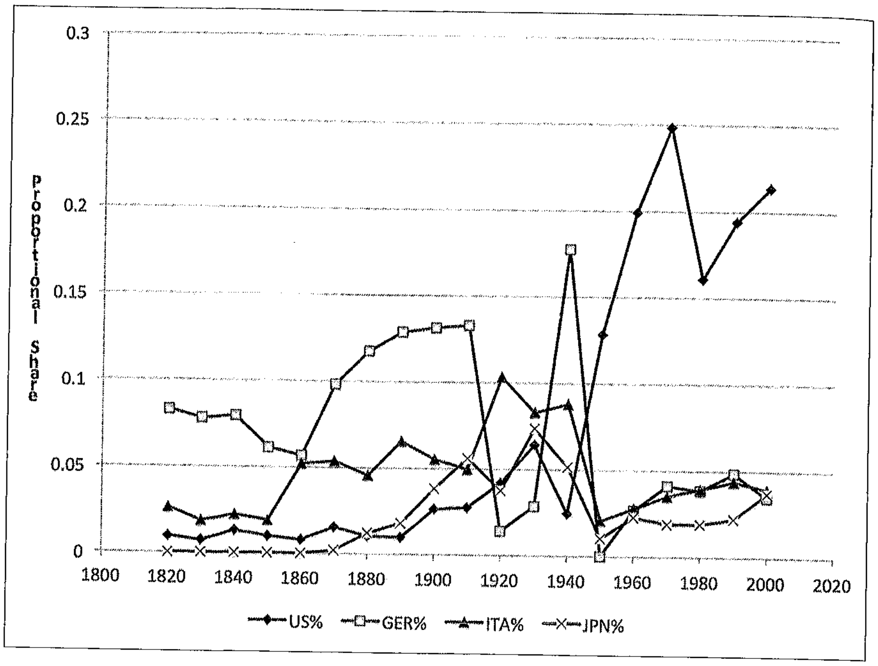
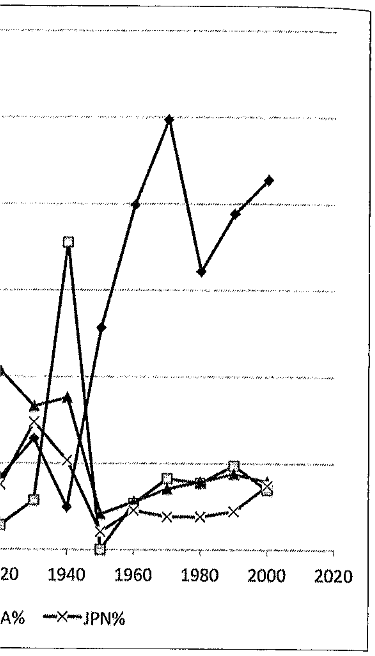



Fig. 2.2. Proportional Share of Military Personnel

well above that threshold. All three states record much more impressive expansion of their military forces subsequently in World Wars I and II. This outcome could be viewed in two ways. Either substantial changes in relative military force were only to come later, or great power status acknowledged early their ability to expand in a period of intensive combat. Actually, both statements are probably correct, but if great power status is based on perceived potential, we will have problems ascertaining how much potential was considered necessary.

A third take on minimal criteria for great power looks at energy consumption per capita as a proxy for economic/technological prowess. Figure 2.3 underscores Italy's lack of a claim to much in the way of industrialization prior to 1861. Germany and the United States had much better claims. Germany had a proportional score close to 15 percent, but the U.S. claim was much stronger (close to 35 percent) by 1898. Japan's position at ascension to great power status was little better than Italy's. China's industrialization really only commenced after it had attained its

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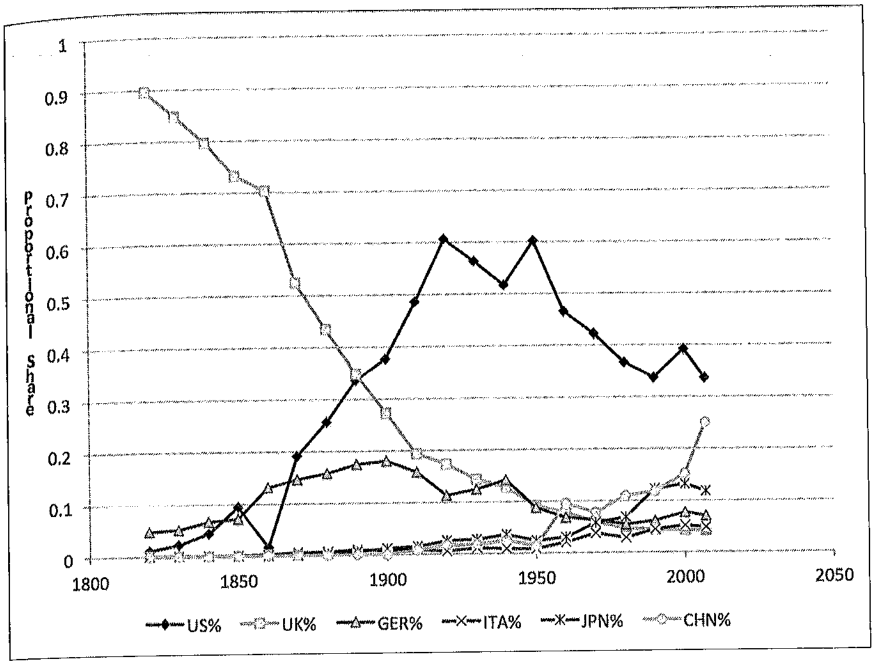


Fig. 2.3. Proportional Share of Energy Consumption per Capita

promotion after World War II and the end of its long-running civil war.[3] Once again, if there is a pattern here, it is not readily discernible.

Population size, the size of the armed forces, and industrialization are all linked in some way to elite status in the international system. Yet looking at the entry points of immediate past great powers, one would be hard-pressed to say how these indicators of capability might be linked to status attainment. It seems more accurate to say that elevation to the great power club is not predicated on satisfying specific minimal criteria pertaining to possessing above-average capabilities. Not shown in the figures are the battlefield demonstrations, which do seem closely linked to the timing of rank promotion. Italy needed considerable help in military matters, but Germany had defeated both Austria-Hungary and France, the United States defeated Spain, Japan had defeated China and Russia, and China had defended its borders against the perceived threat of U.S. invasion. But even here the pattern is muddled. Victory is not required. Nor did all of the great powers-to-be have to defeat other great powers. Some did and some did not. We are forced to conclude that elevation to great power status requires some capabilities, but it is difficult to capture precisely how much of anything is required. That would suggest, perhaps not surprisingly, that the process is highly subjective. Other great powers decide who is in their club and who is not, based no doubt on varying criteria.[4] Sometimes it is a matter of convenience, as in the persistent weakness of the Italian claim. Sometimes it is a matter of demonstrated capabilities that are hard to deny—as in the Japanese claim. In contrast, the U.S. promotion in 1898 had to be more about its growing economic power and potential to fill out the military expectations associated with great power status. Defeating Spain was not in itself a great feat, although it did require marshaling forces in the Caribbean and Manila Bay.

Just as we have no concrete criteria for elevation to great power status, we also have little in the way of theories that explain how it comes about. An exception is Zakaria's analysis of the rise of the United States.[5] Zakaria's argument can be summarized very easily. He argues that there are two leading candidates, both variations on types of realism. Defensive realism contends that "nations expand their political interests when they become increasingly insecure."[6] However, Zakaria rejects this argument because he finds little correlation between periods of insecurity and expansion of interests. He favors the other candidate that is associated with classical realism: "nations expand their political interests abroad when their relative power increases."[7] We have already seen some support for this argument in the data sketched in figures 2.1 through 2.3, even if it was not clear how much relative power increase was needed.

Still, as a theory, the argument that relative power increase drives expanded external activities is missing causal mechanisms linking power and behavior. Zakaria provides a useful hint when he quotes Choucri and North in support of the classical realist argument: "Despite proclamations of nonintervention or even genuinely peaceful intentions, a growing state tends to expand its activities and interests outward—colliding with the spheres of influence of other states—and find itself embroiled in international conflicts, crises and wars. . . . The more a state grows, and thus the greater its capabilities, the more likely it is to follow such a tendency."[8]

We can use a slightly modified version of Choucri and North's lateral-pressure theory to fill in the missing causal mechanisms.

1. Actors are motivated by needs for energy resources to sustain life and by psychologically generated wants, desires, and aspirations related to energy acquisition.
2. In order to satisfy needs, wants, and desires, actors make demands upon themselves, their environment, and other actors.
3. The larger the number of people in a community, organization, or society, the greater will be the volume of needs, wants, and demands.
4. The more advanced the level of technology, the greater will be the amount and the wider the range of resources required and thought to be needed.
5. Demands combine with capabilities to yield actions, but actions will be constrained by the availability of appropriate capabilities and/or resources.
6. To satisfy demands, actors tend to use domestic resources first. If local resources are absent or as local resources diminish or become too expensive, actors will attempt to expand their external activities—lateral pressure (for example, trade, diplomatic representation, military basing, and/or territorial expansion).
7. To satisfy demands, actors may need to improve underdeveloped capabilities. The likelihood of capability development, in turn, is a function of available resources, the volume of demands, and the intensity of crises that accelerate the need for capability development.
8. Actors who persuade others that they possess capabilities that are sufficiently superior in these activities tend to be treated as elite powers or "great powers," albeit subject to some lag for late developers.

These eight theoretical statements translate into the argument that population size and technological development increase demands for resources. Depending on the amount of resources available at home and the capabilities to acquire resources, variable levels of activities away from the home base can be anticipated. Choucri and North were more interested in what happened after multiple actors began increasing their external activities and colliding with one another in the process of doing so. For our own purposes, we do not need to follow the process that far. Great powers are states with different types of capability—bulk size, technological development, or some combination of the two—and that are motivated to become more active in external affairs. If they impress elite decision-makers of other states sufficiently that they have the appropriate qualifications, they can eventually be expected to join the elite circles. It also helps if existing elites view the promotion(s) as advantageous in some way for their own purposes.[9] Figure 2.4 summarizes this theoretical argument about the attainment of great power status.

Figure 2.4 highlights how population and technological development leads to demands that are mediated by capabilities and national endowments before getting to international activity. Population concentrations and national endowments tend to be subject to luck-of-the-draw distributions. It is possible to encourage population increases, and it is equally possible to exploit endowments more or less well. But it is difficult to create large populations overnight. They grow over decades and centuries. National endowments are even less susceptible to creation. At best, states can try to take a neighbor's endowments if they face deficits at home. It worked for Prussia in 1741 when it seized Silesia from Austria. France failed to hold on to the Saarland's coal, and Iraq was even less successful in acquiring Kuwait's petroleum in 1991. Increas-

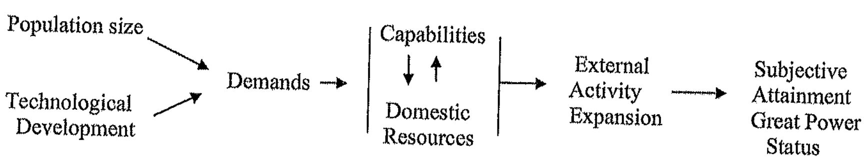


Fig. 2.4. Attaining Great Power Status

ingly, it has become difficult to conquer one's way to a better national-resource endowment. On the other hand, the nature of technological progress has reduced some of the dependency on raw materials.

Technological development is different. It is susceptible to creation and facilitation, much more so at least than population size and national endowment. Contrary to how economic processes are often portrayed, economic growth and technological development are never autonomous processes. They do not take place without assistance. Facilitative political leadership and state institutions are necessary to construct conducive contexts for ascent. Decisions have to be made on which development paths to pursue. Infrastructure must be constructed. Obstacles such as low education levels, inequality, and health and sanitation levels must be reduced. Conflicts among rich, poor, and marginalized groups must be managed. The inflow of investment and resources from abroad must be encouraged. The potential for increased conflict with neighbors and established major powers must also be managed, lest these potential diversions become constraints on further economic development.

Choucri and North envision population size and technology as two different inputs into the demands for resources and expansion. The way history has worked, we think that may have been true in earlier centuries. In the twenty-first century, it is increasingly clear that it will be the interaction between population size and technology that matters most. A large population with an underdeveloped economy could once be militarily competitive. Eighteenth-century Russia is a good example. A large population with an underdeveloped economy can probably no longer be competitive in either the military or the economic sense.

It was also possible once for states with small populations but very strong technology to be competitive. Seventeenth-century Netherlands illustrates this point. But that no longer is the case. Small states with state-of-the-art technology can currently occupy lucrative niches in the world economy, but they are less likely to be fully competitive with the strongest military powers. The history of successive great powers has been one of periodic eclipses, with bigger, stronger powers emerging and overshadowing some of the older elite states that were consequently forced to drop out of international competition.[10]

## Ascent Dynamics

Yet there is definitely a missing link in figure 2.4. Greater international activity, clearly, does not lead automatically to the attainment of great power status. Other factors intervene at this stage. Table 2.2 charts a brief auxiliary theory of what happens in this missing link on the ascent path to great power status.[11] Successful ascent is most likely when domestic and international environments are favorable. What does that mean? If we reduce the factors that are most important to influences that either promote ascent (stimuli) or hold ascent back (constraints), favorable environments can be described as low on constraints and strong on stimuli. Constraints can be political or economic. Depending on the era, great power status implies some ability to pay for competitive military forces. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the capability that was most critical was industrialization. States did not have to be fully industrialized to qualify as great powers, but they needed to be moving toward industrialization to pay for their competitive elite status. Problems in achieving industrialization, therefore, amounted to a major category of domestic economic constraint.

Possible domestic political constraints are multiple in number. For our purposes, they can be reduced to factors that limit the ability of the state to mobilize resources and support for national and international activities. One can have ample resources but no ability or interest to do anything with them. In such a case, an attempt to acquire great power status is less probable. Institutional weaknesses and societal fragmentation are most likely to lead to political constraints on expanded activity. If the preferences of important domestic groups cancel each other out

**Table 2.2. The Conditions for Great Power Ascents**

| | International constraints | International stimuli |
|---|---|---|
| Domestic constraints | Ascent unlikely | Ascent handicapped or delayed |
| Domestic stimuli | Successful ascent less likely | Successful ascent likely |

or paralyze concerted actions, or if the political institutions are simply not up to the task, the political constraints are apt to be fairly critical.

The last crop of new great powers (Italy, Germany, the United States, and Japan) all emerged with considerable political and economic constraints that needed to be overcome in some fashion. Italy was the most constrained and, as a consequence, the "least of the great powers."[12] Once the most innovative and affluent part of Europe, as the medieval era gave way to the early modern, Italy was increasingly marginalized by shifting trade routes in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which reduced significantly its former middleman role in east-west trade. Once an autonomous subsystem in which the major cities competed with one another in Mediterranean and European trade, Italy after 1494 was penetrated by, and subordinated to, the Franco-Spanish rivalry, which became the central conflict axis in western Europe through the mid-seventeenth century.

One of the partial legacies of Spanish control over much of the Italian "boot" was a persistent cleavage between northern and southern Italy. Northern Italy possessed major cities and an agrarian base not unlike France. Southern Italy was more like Latin America, with large estates and a peasantry with limited literacy. Since neither the north nor the south was well endowed with the type of resources that would encourage industrialization, it was not possible for a manufacturing north to exploit the south as a source of raw materials. Instead, southern Italy has served to function as a major constraint on Italian economic growth. Only the advent of electrification in the north enabled Italian economic growth to begin catching up with its European neighbors.

Politically, both north and south were fragmented in the nineteenth century. Several wars, led by Piedmont in the north with external assistance, were required to begin bringing the pieces back together in a semblance of a unified state. While Piedmont served as the integrative core power, it was not an especially strong one and, on its own, could not be expected to defeat its Austrian rival for control of northern Italy. French and, later, German support was required to keep Italy in the European game. Coercive adventures in East (Ethiopia) and North Africa (Libya) were all predicated on the inability of Italy to compete with European great powers in the home region. The continuation of international expansion, if it were to occur, might only be contemplated outside Europe.

Piedmont complemented its own geopolitical weaknesses by bestowing a weak monarchy on the new Italian state. In turn, the weak monarchy attempted unsuccessfully to compete occasionally with a legislature that reflected only too well the persistent regional fragmentation of Italy. Poorly institutionalized political parties could do little to fill the void prior to the post–World War I era. The gradual expansion of an initially very limited enfranchisement only made Italian politics more difficult to steer. Post–World War I fascism may have made Italy look stronger in some respects, but it would be more accurate to say that Italy never overcame its political-economic constraints during its tenure as a nominal great power.

Germany replaced Prussia, which had once been the weakest great power prior to the promotion of Italy. Prussia's weaknesses had been due primarily to small size, limited resources, and bad location. Germany's constraints were much different. By expanding to encompass all of the German states (minus Austria, which had contested control of greater Germany), Germany inherited two cleavages that had not characterized Prussia. An east-west axis distinguished a conservative, grain-growing, Junker-controlled Prussia from a more urbanized, increasingly industrialized and liberal west. A north-south axis separated Protestants from Catholics. While Prussia did constitute a strong integrative core power, it no longer controlled directly the new state's industrialized economic core. But Prussia did supply a strong monarchy that initially controlled Germany's legislature through an adroit chancellor (Bismarck). With Bismarck's dismissal in 1890, monarchical control over German politics and its parliament proved to be less predictable. Initially at least, political coordination was made somewhat more difficult by a federal system in which taxes were raised primarily by the constituent states and not the federal center.

Although Germany resembled Italy in terms of its fragmentation at the outset, Germany had more resources with which to work and stronger leadership. Its size and technological successes vaulted Germany to be the lead economy in Europe and a possible successor to Britain at the global level. In the end, none of that proved all that beneficial to Germany, but in the short run its economic prowess, in conjunction with the region's lead army, did help overcome problems associated with domestic cleavages and political leadership. The economic and military capabilities also clearly reinforced Germany's claim to great power status.

If Italy and Germany began their great power tenures as fragmented states, the United States emerged in the late nineteenth century as a state once so divided that a full-fledged Civil War had been waged to determine which half would predominate. The North was industrializing while the South was dedicated to an agrarian plantation economy, at one time fueled by slave labor. The North won the Civil War, occupied the South, but ultimately backed away from radically changing the South's political economy other than abolishing the slavery institution.

Decision-makers also backed away from retaining the strong and well-armed state created to win the Civil War. But divided as it was, the United States benefited from relatively well developed political institutions in its party/legislature and judicial systems that, in tandem, proved sufficient to create a national economy demanded by industrialization prior to the emergence of a powerful chief executive or even much centralization in the U.S. federal system in the twentieth century.

In this respect, it is important to highlight that a conventionally strong state was not necessary to facilitate the development of a strong state. It was not just the creation of a national market unhindered by subnational boundaries and regulations that was critical. As Skowronek notes, labor organizations, nationally oriented corporations, and trusts/oligopolies emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century.[13] Labor and business clashed violently. Different types of business interests clashed. New technology appeared that required both facilitation and regulation. Conflicts were inevitable. In order to maintain some semblance of order in the economy, governmental adjustments were required. In the U.S. case, a series of Republican Party leaders were given credit for both creating a powerful state to win the 1861–1865 Civil War and allowing it to atrophy through the 1870s. Afterward, the same party struggled to manipulate congressional hearings, carefully screened Supreme Court justice appointments, and contributed to the development of an independent central state bureaucracy. The driving factor was the urge to be reelected, and the basic strategy was to advance Northern industrial interests at the expense of Southern economic preferences and needs. It did not require a conspiracy—only an environment that consistently rewarded adherence to persistent goals given pressing political-economic problems, rational politicians seeking reelection, and a number of decades of political combat in which not all of the battles were won or winnable. As Skowronek puts it, crisis, conflict and increasing complexity combined to lead to governmental expansion in the late nineteenth century.[14] The process did not end then, of course. More crises, continuing conflict, and greater complexity followed—as did more governmental expansion.

Placing explanatory emphasis on the three "c's" (crisis, conflict, and complexity) does not guarantee a concrete outcome. Presumably, the combination could lead to political chaos (another "c") or simply political paralysis. In the American case, however, it did not, although presumably considerable trial and error was involved.

Lockwood also attributes a trial-and-error approach to the Japanese experience.[15] No explicit planning was involved. As industrialization and a national economy emerged, the governmental response was incremental and sufficiently flexible to recognize and correct its errors eventually. It is also described as "energetic" in taking steps to improve transportation and communications, to establish new industries, and to modernize the army and navy.[16] Moreover, industrialization altered the political-economic environment fundamentally. A traditional and quite narrow elite was gradually broadened, while at the same time the state's resources for dealing with problems were expanded. It also helped that agrarian workers were largely politically passive through World War I.

But industrialization also changed foreign-policy stakes and goals. A major economic constraint for Japan was the relative absence of industrial raw materials at home but readily available in Manchuria and Southeast Asia. Satisfying the prerequisites for fueling industrialization encouraged some groups to insist on an imperial presence in Asia. It was not the only strategy conceivable, but as industrialization progressed, the attractiveness of a coercive solution to its economic problems became more acute and stimulated more aggressive action on the part of Japanese state agents, interest groups, and decision-makers.

Domestic political stimuli, thus, tend to work just the opposite of the restraining effects of constraints. Expanding economic wealth, technological complexity, and increased interest in trade lead to interests in increased international activity. So too do political leadership and strong institutions that can coordinate domestic activities in order to participate more effectively in international activities.

Internationally, perhaps the greatest constraint is a highly hierarchical distribution of power and resources. The ascent of new great powers is less likely when power is highly concentrated in the international system (unless the new great powers have recently won their "spurs" in battle).[17] More probable are great powers emerging in periods of power deconcentration. Of course, this observation tends toward the tautological because the emergence of new great power candidates is one of the more important ingredients for periods of power deconcentration. Still, less hierarchy in the international system should not only encourage great power candidates to make bids for greater status, it should also signify less capability on the part of the defenders of the systemic status quo to resist the new bids.

Similarly, the most prominent types of international stimuli to increased activity are perceived threats to national security and opportunities to improve national position. Sometimes it is difficult to tell one from the other. Italy expanded in Ethiopia and Libya because it could not take on Austria-Hungary to regain territories that were deemed belonging to Italy or France in Tunisia. Germany sought its place "in the sun," which led to naval and colonial expansion. The United States had long resisted expanding into the Caribbean but leaped at the opportunity to take Cuba and the Philippines away from Spain. Japan fought both China and Russia separately in its initial plans to predominate in Korea and Manchuria.

## India and Great Power Status

While the consensus on how economies acquire greater complexity and affluence is less developed than it should be, we know even less about how political leadership and state institutions facilitate and constrain upward mobility in the international system. Our appreciation for political leadership tends to be anecdotal. Our understanding of states is most focused on the strong and weak ends of the continuum. We know that some states have considerable capacity and that others have very little. It is not necessary to choose between examining political leadership and state strength, but it is probably not prudent to do both at the same time. Of the two, state strength seems to have more potential for generalization, and it is on this question that the next chapter will focus.

Our theoretical material on state-making distinguishes readily between "strong" and "weak" states. But what about the in-between states —those that are neither strong nor weak? India is such a state and therefore provides a good anchor point for this examination. Beginning with a new metric for comparing state capacity, which combines indicators on extraction capability, weapons monopoly, and citizen identification, India can be shown to fall roughly in the middle of the pack of some 130 states for which data are available. That may not be a disadvantageous position for a fairly new state, but India has clear aspirations to join the great power ranks. Can a medium-capacity state reasonably anticipate ascension to global elite status? Historically, the answer would appear to lie in the affirmative, but not without caveats. That is, weaknesses at home tend to hobble both continued economic ascent and foreign-policy activities abroad. Elite rank may be acquired, but we can assume that its activation will be handicapped in various ways.

A useful place to continue where we left off with explaining state expansion to great power status is with Nayar and Paul's list of ten elements that are deemed essential for newly claiming major power status.[18] They specify four "hard power" resources (military, economic, technological/knowledge, and demographic), which overlap with the sources of increased demand in figure 2.4, and six "soft power" resources (norms, international institutional leadership, culture, state capacity, strategy/diplomacy, and national leadership), which flesh out what are summarized as capabilities in figure 2.4. It is a good list but it is only a list. Clearly, all ten items are not equally important. Listing state capacity as a soft power resource is even a bit curious. Moreover, how the elements are connected is left unspecified.

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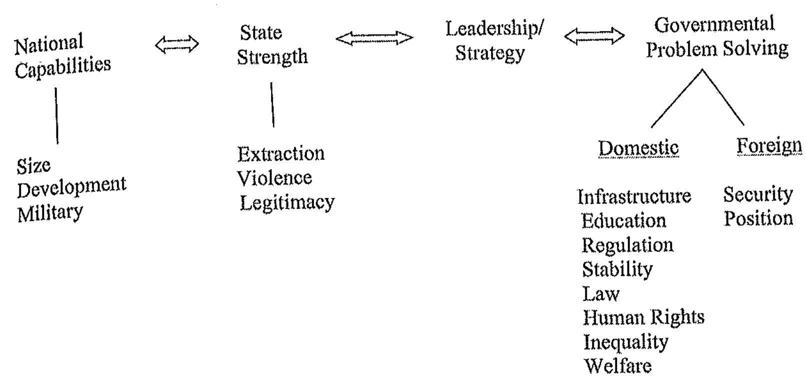


Fig. 2.5. State Strength and the Ascent Problem

The list is easily reconfigured into the model sketched in figure 2.5. National capabilities frame the potential for great powerhood, as we have implied before. A credible military force; a large, developed, and thriving economy; a large, skilled, and expanding population; and a competitive technological base are all vital to establishing claims to elite status in world politics. Just how much military force, what size economy and population, and what type of technology vary by century. Yet some mixture of formidable capability base is critical. Aspiring elite powers either have to possess this foundation or they have to acquire it as quickly as possible to sustain their status.

Unlike in Nayar and Paul, "state capacity" is conceptualized in figure 2.5 as "state strength," and while it certainly possesses soft attributes, it also has a claim to a "hard power" resource status on par with the national capabilities set. State strength, in conjunction with national leadership and strategy, translates resources into governmental problem solving. State strength is often equated with capacity, as in the extraction of tax and manpower resources for national projects, but there is more involved. A case will be made in this analysis for interpreting state strength as a combination of extraction, violence, and legitimacy. No claim is made that aspiring elite powers must have strong states to qualify as major powers. However, the possession of a less-than-strong state will be a serious liability in the quest for higher status. As in the case of the resource foundation, a handicapped state structure can be overcome to some extent by strenuous and clever leadership. Ultimately, though, the constraints of weaknesses—whether they are located in the resource foundation and/or the state, can be expected to impede both the ascent toward greater status and its maintenance once achieved—as we argued earlier (see table 2.2). Capabilities are less likely to be translated into influence abroad. Governmental problems at home are less likely to be resolved.

We will be focusing on the Indian state in the chapters that follow. But why exactly is India in the running for ascent into the great power ranks now? After all, in terms of its capability foundation, it has been a large state since its independence in 1947. A case could have been made for giving it a permanent seat on the UN Security Council from the outset but was not. In its home region, it has been unquestionably the preeminent state, albeit not without intermittent challenges from Pakistan. India's accession to the nuclear power ranks is relatively recent, but not that recent.

Perhaps the main reason for ongoing discussions about India's future status is its BRIC categorization. Brazil, Russia, India, and China have been anointed as the four economies most likely to become the largest in the world.[19] In this respect, they could surpass the current largest economy, the United States, not only in absolute size but also in terms of economic development. As shown in figure 2.6, there is an income-technological trajectory by which less developed (low income or low gross domestic product per capita) can move up the income ladder toward the peak position at the pinnacle of the system. At the peak, the most developed economy in the world economy operates at the technological frontier, innovating new ways of producing and transporting commodities.

There is no reason to assume that the system's lead economy position will be monopolized permanently by one state forever. On the contrary, some turnover is probable. While there are definitely advantages to possessing the lead economy, the leadership in economic innovation can prove to be disadvantageous. Leading can result in complacency and a reluctance to experiment with new ways of doing things when the old ways have worked so well. Each generation of new technology de-

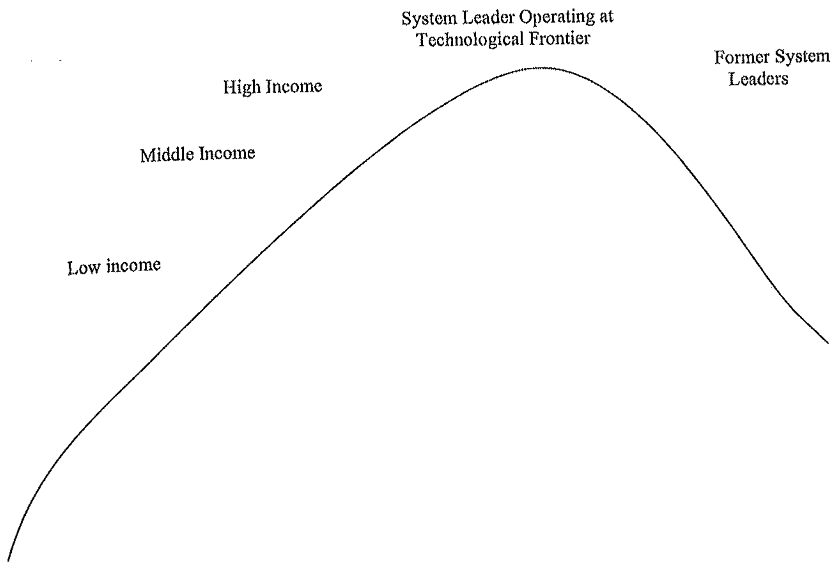


Fig. 2.6. The Income-Technology Trajectory

pends on resources that may be readily available in some places but not in others. An advantaged economy in one era may be disadvantaged in another. Smaller leaders may ultimately be eclipsed by economies that are simply larger and better endowed.

Historically, there has been turnover in the identity of the world's lead economy. The United States supplanted Britain. Britain had earlier supplanted the Netherlands. It is possible to trace this process back even farther but the point remains that lead economies come and go. Perhaps it is now approaching time for an even larger economy to supplant the U.S. lead. But there are two assumptions associated with BRIC discussions. One is that the world's largest economies will also become the world's highest income economies. This possibility is by no means guaranteed. China, for instance, has been the world's largest economy before. So has India—as shown in figure 2.7.[20] That status did not automatically confer technological leadership in the world economy.[21] Absolute size is not a prerequisite to technological leadership and may even be detrimental.[22] Thus, any or all of the BRICs could become the world economy's largest without moving all the way up the development trajectory shown in figure 2.6.

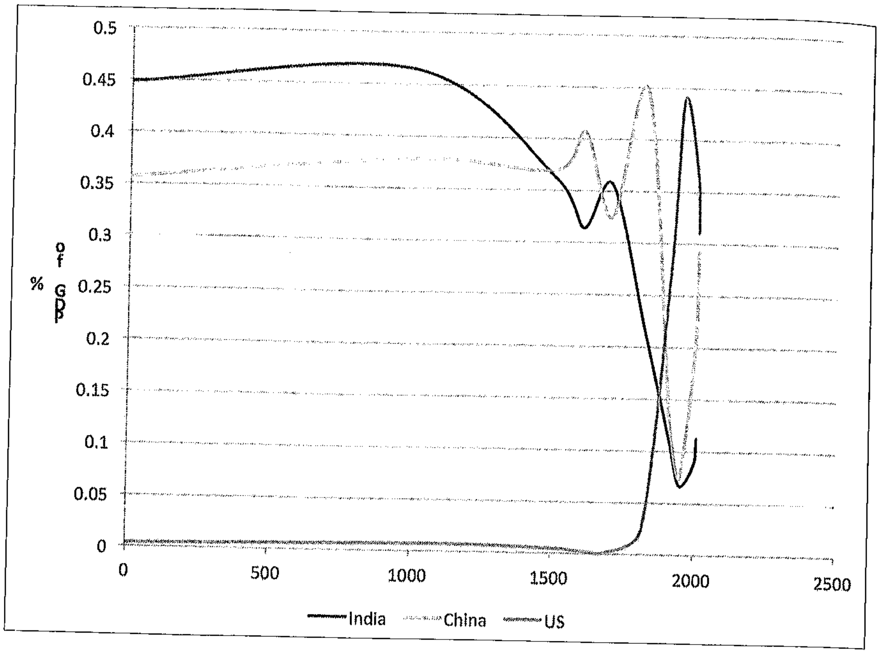


Fig. 2.7. Historical GDP Shares

In this context, there is a significant problem known as the "middle-income trap." Low-income economies can move toward middle-income status, replacing less productive, agrarian labor with industrial productivity and copying technology already developed. There comes a point, however, at which this development strategy no longer works. The gains from replacing agrarian productivity have been realized. Standard technologies have been duplicated. The next step up the ladder requires developing the ability to create new technologies and to implement them as quickly as they are being developed elsewhere—as opposed to simply borrowing from the existing technological inventory. Succeeding at making this step up is by no means straightforward or perhaps even likely for all four BRICs. Hence, movement up the income ladder can be stalled at various points.

Figure 2.8 charts numbers for national gross domestic product per capita over time for the four BRICs. Exactly where the dividing line is between high and middle income is somewhat arbitrary and, of course,

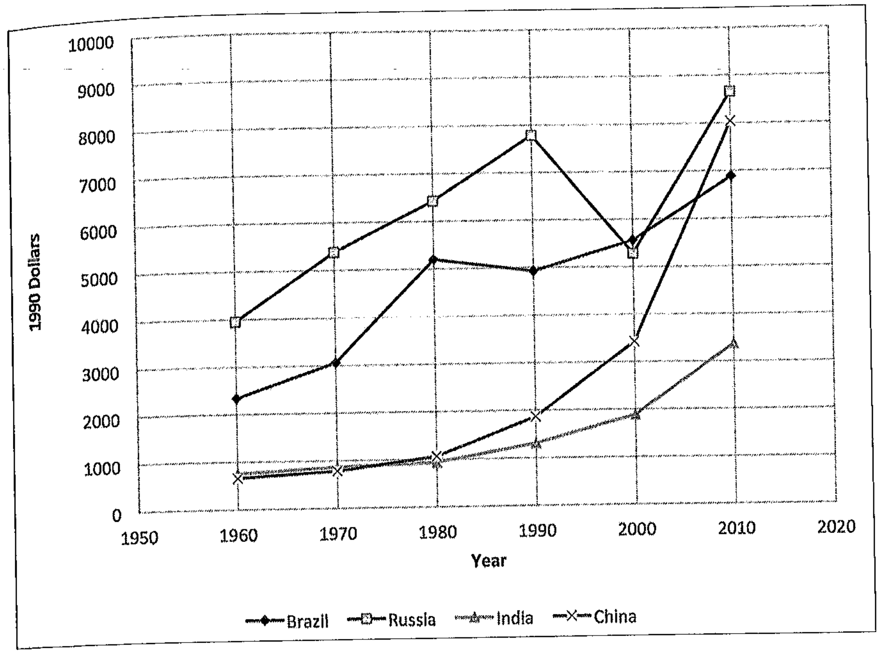


Fig. 2.8. BRIC GDP per Capita, 1960–2010 *Note: Gross domestic product per capita is expressed in 1990 International Geary-Khamis dollars based on information reported in Angus Maddison, http://www.ggdc.net/maddison/maddison-project/home.htm, accessed. February 24, 2016, and the group continuing to update the Maddison data set. See J. Bolt and J. L. van Zanden, "Collaborative Research on Historical National Accounts,"* Economic History Review *67, 3: 627–651, and at www.ggdc.net/maddison/maddison-project/home.htm, accessed February 24, 2016.*

changes from decade to decade. For figure 2.8, a very minimalist threshold might be viewed as ranging approximately from US$3,000 (in 1960) to $7,623 (in 2010).[23] Russia had earlier managed to break into the high-income group but only barely and encountered major problems in staying there. More recently, Russian income has rebounded but primarily by selling raw materials—a strategy that cannot be sustained in the long term. Brazil has hovered in the vicinity of the threshold without breaking through as yet—a good illustration of the middle-income trap. China and India started very definitively from low-income levels. China has passed the 25 percent threshold; India has some way to go.

If the Russian economy continues to have difficulties staying in the high-income category, however marginally, one would expect it to have continuing and mounting problems in maintaining its major power military arsenal, largely inherited from its superpower days. Should Brazil not be able to break out of the middle-income category in the near future, its claims to major power status will be seriously jeopardized. Faltering Chinese growth would deflate or at least slow widespread expectations about China becoming the world's lead economy. Steady progress toward escaping the middle-income trap will be needed by India to at least buttress its own claims to major power status. Economic wealth is not destiny in world politics, but the international system seems to be moving toward development and technological complexity being primary prerequisites for maintaining, if not acquiring, elite status.[24]

Table 2.3 helps clarify this potential problem. At the low-income level, policy needs to be focused on creating a setting in which domestic production can be expanded successfully either through home consumption, exports, or, more likely, some combination. Yet the low wages and related cost competitiveness of low-income economies is unlikely to remain constant. Economic growth implies higher wages and some decline in cost competitiveness. Private and public policy foci need to shift to meeting increased and different kinds of demand at home, as well as to developing new products and markets abroad. The demands for stronger institutions to support these activities shift. For middle-income countries to continue growing, there is a greater emphasis on fostering greater skills and innovation through higher education and qualitative improvements in governance for more-complex societies.

Homi Kharas, in particular, argues that political leadership may be the most critical factor in evading the inability to move beyond the middle-income level.[25] Government needs to encourage economic growth over the multigenerational long term. Ascent in the income trajectory is unlikely to be continuous or extremely rapid. There will be setbacks, slowdowns, and crises, as well as various costs in terms of social disruptions and increased political conflict. All of this requires management, both in the short term and long term. It also requires constructing an institutional context in which continued economic growth can take place.

**Table 2.3. Low- and Middle-Income Policy Strategies**

| Income status | Public and private policy strategies |
|---|---|
| Low | Expand domestic production capabilities; save and/or borrow to build infrastructure, cities, and education networks; marshal societal resources and deploy effectively; work to avoid the low-income trap |
| Middle | Encourage and facilitate expanded demand from growing middle class for commodities characterized by higher quality and diversity; develop new processes, products, and markets to expand exports in response to higher wages and declining cost competitiveness; improve institutions for property rights, capital markets, competition; address growing income distribution disparities that might stifle the expansion of economic demand; work to avoid the middle-income trap |

*Sources: Based on Homi Kharas, "Realizing the Asian Century: Mega-challenges and Risks," in* Asia 2050: Realizing the Asian Century, *ed. Harinder S. Kohli, Ashok Sharma, and Anil Sood (New Delhi: Sage, 2011), 52–53.*

The second assumption has to do with the political-military status that may come with increased economic/technological status. If the BRICs substantially improve their economic status, does it necessarily follow that they will also become major powers in international politics? There are three problems here. One is that two of the BRICs (Russia and China) are already considered major powers. Their elite status did not depend on possessing the largest or fastest growing economies in the world economy. Russia has been a major power since at least the early eighteenth century. For a time, it seemed to challenge the U.S. lead during the Cold War before collapsing temporarily and is only now slowly reemerging as an elite state. For a long time, China was sufficiently powerful to remain outside the Western-centric international system but was drawn in eventually and subordinated in the nineteenth century. It was able to throw off its subordination to some extent after World War II and fight the United States to a draw in Korea.

If two of the BRICs are already major powers, the linkage between BRIC status and acquiring great power status is murky. The fact that Germany and Japan, two other states with very successful economies after 1945, have yet to attain great power status makes the connection between economic success and military-political status all the more hazy. Finally, the third problem with this BRIC–great power assumption is that in the past great power status has had to be earned on the battlefield. New great powers did not necessarily have to win or fight major power opponents, although both characteristics would help, but they did have to demonstrate significant military-political capability—with or without an equivalent economic capability foundation. BRIC commentators appear to believe that the rites of passage for great powers have been altered. Perhaps they have, but if they have, it remains unclear to what extent that is the case and/or what new minimal criteria might be requisite.

All of this discussion only means that we need to exercise caution in assuming that BRIC status necessarily means high-income economies operating at the system's technological frontier and/or achieving automatic great power status soon. These things may come in time or they may not. Some of the things may come about while others do not. However, there are some expectations that seem more probable. One is that whatever processes are likely to unfold, it is unlikely that they will unfold without help. By this we mean that economic growth processes are neither autonomous nor sufficient to create great powers. As depicted in figures 2.7 and 2.8, various factors intervene in the translation of capability and status in world politics. Leaders and their strategies make some difference, but so does the state through which each operates. Strong leaders, on occasion, can work miracles with weak states for a while. Yet they cannot be expected to provide sufficient governance on the basis of their charisma and personality alone. There are clear limitations on what can be done without the institutional support of a reasonably well functioning state. Roads and ports do not get built. Students are not educated adequately. Poverty and inequalities foster rebellion and separatism. Ethnic tensions go unmanaged. Rampant corruption erodes faith in the political system. Bureaucratic inertia stifles the prospects for positive changes. Foreign investors look elsewhere for safer bets to make money. Vested interests from older regimes are not defeated politically so that new ways of doing things can at least be attempted.

This chapter has reviewed patterns associated with great power ascents in previous centuries. Theories to account for ascent, successful and otherwise, have been outlined. Still, the precise criteria for attaining great power status remain hazy. Size matters. Technological development certainly helps, just as it may provide expanded motivation for international activities. What is clear from a survey of previous ascents is that strong states are not a prerequisite for achieving elite status in world politics. Yet the absence of this institutional capacity may constitute a major domestic constraint. Continued economic growth and resource mobilization hinge on effective state interventions. Problems with state capacity, therefore, should be expected to hinder the rise of states to great power status. Similarly, once higher status has been achieved, problems with state capacity should be expected to get in the way of operationalizing an elite position in world politics.

But we need something more than the ambiguities of "state capacity" to explore further this issue of state strengths and weaknesses. Moreover, we need something more than the familiar labels of strong, weak, and failed states. Most states fit none of these labels. They fall in between the continuum end points of strong and failed states. Although a large number of states may appear to be relatively weak, they more often reflect mixed bags of moderate strengths and blatant weaknesses. Their capacities are neither omnipotent nor entirely missing. They are instead middling. To elaborate this conceptualization of state capacity, it is necessary to first contemplate what states do. We do this by relying on K. J. Holsti's concept of state strength in the next three chapters, which focus on extraction, violence monopoly, and legitimacy.[26] But we take the argument one step further by also measuring these components of state strength—in order to better identify where specific states fall on the state-capacity continuum.